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CONSIDERATIONS

RESPECTING THE

EXPEDIENCY OF ESTABLISHING

AN

Hospital for Officers

ON FOREIGN SERVICE:

SUGGESTED BY

THE WRITER'S EXPERIENCE

DURING THE

Late Occupation

OF

WALCHEREN.

BY

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AND

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1810.

TO THE
Officers of the British Army,

THE FOLLOWING
CONSIDERATIONS

are respectfully submitted;

BY

THEIR VERY SINCERE WELL-WISHER,

AND MOST OBEDIENT

HUMBLE SERVANT,

A. B. FAULKNER.

January, 1810.

PREFACE.

BEFORE entering on the subject of these pages, there is a point which appears to be of so much importance to the public service, that I cannot persuade myself to overlook it; I mean, the propriety of communicating to the Medical Board, or to some confidential member of it, the destination of any expedition which it may be deemed fit by ministers to send out. There is hardly an expedition to be recollected which does not afford a proof of the advantage that might have resulted from such a communication.

It will naturally be inferred, that had the medical department been aware that Walcheren was the place to which the late expedition was destined, a variety of means might have been devised to mitigate the severity, if not to limit the extent, of the diseases which raged among our gallant troops. Provision might have been made to guard against the susceptibility which contributed to the propagation of those diseases. A few simple short rules as to diet and regimen, circulated among the army immediately after its disembarkation, or rather before, would have materially tended to this purpose. There might, no doubt, be many found to treat such rules with indifference; but it would be absurd to suppose, that the soldiery in general could be so insensible when apprised of the consequences.

Neither should we in that case have had reason to complain of a scarcity of medical officers, which at one time

was so great that the sick allotted to physicians, to speak moderately, were thrice as numerous as it was possible for them to attend, so as to satisfy their own consciences, and give to their patients the full benefit of medical advice and assistance. In consequence of this extraordinary accumulation of cases, some medical officers were soon absolutely exhausted by unceasing efforts to perform their duty: though, indeed, any idea of duty falls far short of the motive which must prompt any man of feeling, in such a scene of calamity, to use the utmost exertion in his power. Every gentleman appeared perfectly willing to make that exertion; but the number of our staff was so deficient, that all such exertion was comparatively unavailing.

That the mischief of this deficiency would have been completely guarded against, if the Medical Board had been fully informed of our destination, there can be no doubt. Then let me ask, why were they not apprised of that destination? I know it will be answered, that the expedition was a state secret, which it was not allowable to disclose to the Medical Board. But when I ask why this was not allowable, I think it will be difficult to devise a satisfactory answer. It will not, surely, be pretended, that a member of the Board which presides over the medical department of the army, is unlikely to possess such intelligence and discretion, such integrity and honour, as should render him worthy to be confided in, by the cabinet, upon any important medical question. Had it been the practice to consult and confide in high medical authorities, I am persuaded that provision would have been made to guard against the progress of disease, which

has committed such ravages among our army in various instances; from the expeditions to the Havannah and St. Domingo, down to those of Spain and Walcheren. The propriety of consulting such authority upon measures of this nature, seems, indeed, so obvious, that one is justified in expressing some surprise at the omission.

The grounds upon which I rest this opinion I will state very concisely. In all military projects relating to what is termed an expedition, the questions for enquiry and deliberation are, what is the value of the object in view, and what are the hazards to be encountered, and the losses to be calculated upon, for the attainment of that object—in order thereby to decide whether the object be worthy of the hazard. Upon the first question, the cabinet, as it is generally constituted, is, no doubt, fully competent to determine; but in calculating hazards and losses, and in providing the means of preserving the health of our troops in particular climates, it is surely an object of the last importance to consult medical opinions. The necessity, indeed, for such consultation, must be admitted by any one who considers, that in all our recent expeditions disease has been much more fatal than the sword. If such consultation had taken place previously to the sailing of the late expedition to Walcheren, I think it highly probable that we should not now have to lament the actual loss of nearly 4000 lives, besides the serious injuries which have unfitted for duty so large a portion of the army employed upon that service.

CONSIDERATIONS,

&c. &c.

AMONG the arrangements for the sick on the late campaign in Walcheren, the mode of accommodating sick officers was calculated in a peculiar degree to arrest notice, and seems particularly to call for representation.

The system which invariably obtains upon foreign service, of distributing officers in billets when they are to be attended by the medical staff, instead of accommodating them collectively in an hospital, is productive of much and serious evil, and this evil was severely felt in Walcheren. In consequence of the distance of their billets from the general hospital, officers were deprived of the facilities of prompt medical attendance, and care of every kind, which was necessary for their condition. The time of a medical officer was wasted in long and circuitous visits to his patients; it was therefore for the most part impossible to prescribe for them in proper time; and medicines could not be prepared and brought from the general hospital when they were most necessary. While there was an immense proportion of sick

in hospital, the attention of the physician was required there in the first instance, to regulate the diet and other necessities; and until that duty was completed, he could not even commence his visits to the officers. It was therefore late in the day (not unfrequently four o'clock) before all the officers could be seen for the first time; and before their medicines could be prepared at the general hospital, the time for the evening visit had nearly arrived. It was obviously impossible to employ medicines advantageously under such circumstances of delay and interruption, so much of their efficacy depending as it does on timely exhibition.

During the absence of their servants, in procuring medicines from the general hospital, to what inconveniences must not officers be liable in critical circumstances of disease. These inconveniences were, indeed, of frequent occurrence. In the case of an officer affected with delirium, when it was most dangerous to leave him alone, for even a few minutes together, I have been obliged myself, more than once, to remain a full hour at his bedside, while his servant was getting my prescription prepared. Thus was the time of the physician, which unfortunately could be but ill spared, consumed in performing the duty of a nurse.

The constant and laborious attention required in cases of extreme urgency, often unfitted the servants for their duty. They were frequently under the necessity of watching night and day

without relief—a task to which no constitution could be long competent; they were, therefore, sometimes taken ill, and sent to the hospital, leaving their masters altogether destitute of assistance. It was for the most part difficult, sometimes impossible, to procure others to supply their places, as the services of every man appointed to the care of the sick were so much required for those who daily crowded into the general hospital.*

Indeed the inconveniences arising from attending sick officers in billets were so numerous, that it was impossible for the most zealous medical officer to apply his talents either with justice to his patient or any kind of satisfaction to himself.

In order more fully to illustrate the evils of which I have been speaking, I shall relate the following cases, the authenticity of which I am enabled fully to establish.—

A medical officer, labouring under a severe remittent fever, was billeted in so confined an apartment as scarcely admitted of passing and re-passing freely by the bedside: he was unprovided with a servant throughout the whole of his illness; the physician was, of course, obliged to administer medicines himself, which, on account of the multiplicity of pressing professional engage-

* Here let me observe, that should the servant be a person of bad inclinations, much mischief may follow from his being charged with such a serious trust, and in a situation where there is no eye to watch his conduct. If he be lazy or unfeeling, medicines will not be given; if dishonest, his dying master's purse, or other valuables, will be plundered.

ments, he could only do at very irregular periods. In this deplorable situation the patient remained for several days; the people of the house in which he lodged, and who had occasionally attended him, at length refusing indignantly to render him farther assistance*. Fortunately, however, after many weeks' confinement in this melancholy condition, the scale turned in his favour, and he recovered. The physician who attended him took me to witness the distress this gentleman was suffering, as it formed a striking instance of the misery to which sick officers were exposed, from the want of suitable accommodation.

A field-officer of the - - - - - regiment, in the last extremity of illness, was lodged in so incommodious a billet, that it was thought expedient to remove him to another, *although in a dying state*: he expired in a few days after this removal.

Another officer of the same regiment, severely afflicted with fever, was, after being conveyed in a covered waggon from Fort Haak to Middelburg, under the necessity of remaining in the market-place in the waggon whilst a brother officer who accompanied him endeavoured in vain to procure a billet. At length the keeper of a common gin-shop,

* The objection of the inhabitants to the admission of persons labouring under disease, was another evil of not the least magnitude, and deserves to be taken into the general account against the system of billeting the sick. Our ignorance of their language precluded us from receiving all the assistance which their humanity might otherwise have disposed them to afford, in alleviating the distresses of the sick. But, indeed, I have never

observing this officer's situation; humanely made an offer of an apartment in his house, which, under the pressure of such circumstances, was readily accepted: but this officer was lodged in a chamber immediately over the tap-room, exposed to all the disturbance and inconvenience incident to such a residence. His situation was still further aggravated by the circumstance of a person sleeping in the same room.

The following letter, from one of my colleagues, furnishes an instance of peculiar distress.—

“ Middelburg, September 12, 1809.

“ I FOUND Lieutenant - - - - of the - - regiment this day in a miserable chamber, without any description of attendant, though in a dangerous state of fever, and too weak to render himself any assistance, being scarcely able to take the medicines off the table placed at his bedside. The soldier who formerly served him was taken violently ill two days ago, and is now in hospital.”

I received the following communication from a regimental surgeon.—

“ Middelburg, September 22, 1809.

“ Dear sir,

“ THERE is unfortunately a strong case to prove the disadvantages which sick officers labour under when billeted in a large town, to be met with at letter C, No. 99.

been able to learn that the spirit of accommodation towards us was very considerable. Many instances might be related where a different disposition was manifested; not a few have fallen under my own observation: at the same time, it is natural that the inhabitants should take precaution against the exposure of their families to disease. But this circumstance is deserving of much attention, because it furnishes an argument against distributing the sick in billets, when it can be avoided,

“ Captain - - - informs me, that he was called into the house, and found a person whom he believes to be a medical officer extremely ill, without any servant or attendant whatever. If a convalescent could be spared from the general hospital, it might be of great service.”

In addition to these facts, I am enabled to state, that some officers, seriously indisposed, have been known to give up their beds out of compassion to others in a state of greater danger, who were without servants and unequal to the exertion of procuring billets for themselves. One instance of this kind came under my own experience.

On account of the distances at which sick officers were sometimes distributed, I have known eight cases to occupy more of my time than sixty-five in hospital. How severely must the service suffer from this cause alone, especially as the number of medical officers was so very unequal to the laborious duty which was daily accumulating upon them!

The delay occasioned by the difficulty of discovering the residence of sick officers, is another circumstance not unworthy to be noticed. I should not mention it, if the same inconveniences were not liable to occur upon a future service, particularly where officers are distributed through large towns.*

* The inconveniences I allude to, were so much felt by the inspector of hospitals, that, when disease was widely extending among the officers, he used his endeavours to accommodate as many of them as possible in the vicinity of the general hospital.

The reflections which these cases were naturally calculated to produce in the mind of any man anxious to do his duty, were materially strengthened by the case described in the following letter, which I took occasion to address to the inspector of hospitals: viz.—

“Middelburg, August 26, 1809.

“Sir,

“THE wretched state in which I this day found one of my patients, an officer, without servant or attendant of any kind, under the influence of a severe disease, calls for the strongest representation I am capable of making. He has been four days lying upon the floor of a small dirty chamber, with all the accumulated filth of that time unremoved. In consequence of those privations, his complaint has gained a considerable height. There is no one even to get a prescription made up for him.

“If any house or public building could be procured, to accomodate officers taken suddenly ill, who have not time or the facilities of providing billets, servants, &c. it might be of the utmost importance.

“The gentleman to whom I immediately allude, is Lieut. - - - - of the - - regiment, at No. 201, Cingal-street, letter N. But there are many others (whose names, if you think necessary, I can mention) in circumstances nearly similar.

“Another of my patients, an officer, lies ill of fever in a mill.*

“I really have but little time to spare, from the press of occupation, to devote to subjects of this kind. One instant longer, however, I must take leave to trespass upon you, in adverting to another matter of not less moment than what I have stated: it is this---that I feel myself incompetent to give that proper share of con-

* This machine, or mill, made so loud and incessant a noise, as to prevent my hearing answers to the questions I put to him.

sideration to each case which it would require. I have fifty-seven patients in hospital, besides eight or nine officers, scattered at wide distances through this town. I must beg, therefore, that you will not add to their numbers.

"Would it not be highly expedient to state to the commander of the forces the necessity that exists for more physicians, to meet the embarrassing urgency of so many serious cases as now crowd upon us?"

"My health is the last circumstance I should wish to plead for declining the severity of duty; at the same time I must be permitted to declare, that I feel myself quite unequal to the conscientious discharge of the task imposed upon me.

"I have the honour to be, &c." *

Feeling for the miseries under which the gentleman alluded to in the foregoing letter was suffering, I requested of him, when he had sufficiently recovered, to favour me, in writing, with the particulars and causes which led to them. He accordingly made to me the following communication:

"Sir,

"It being your request, when you had the goodness to call upon me, that I should mention the cause of my being left in so uncomfortable and destitute a situation as that in which you found me, I beg leave to state, for your information, that I was taken extremely unwell about two days before my regiment embarked. Upon that event I was carried down to the beach (contrary to my inclination) in a cart, but through illness was unable to proceed any farther. The consequence was, that my regiment embarked, and I was left without a servant or any attendant whatever. The next morning

* Some days after this letter was sent, the inspector of hospitals expressed a wish to be furnished with the reasons upon which I grounded my proposition. I accordingly transmitted to him a concise statement of the reasons which have already been detailed.

I came to Middelburg, where I got into a wretched billet, which had been provided for me by an officer, and remained without any medical assistance until my good fortune threw you, sir, in my way, which was nearly thirty-six hours after my arrival in this town.

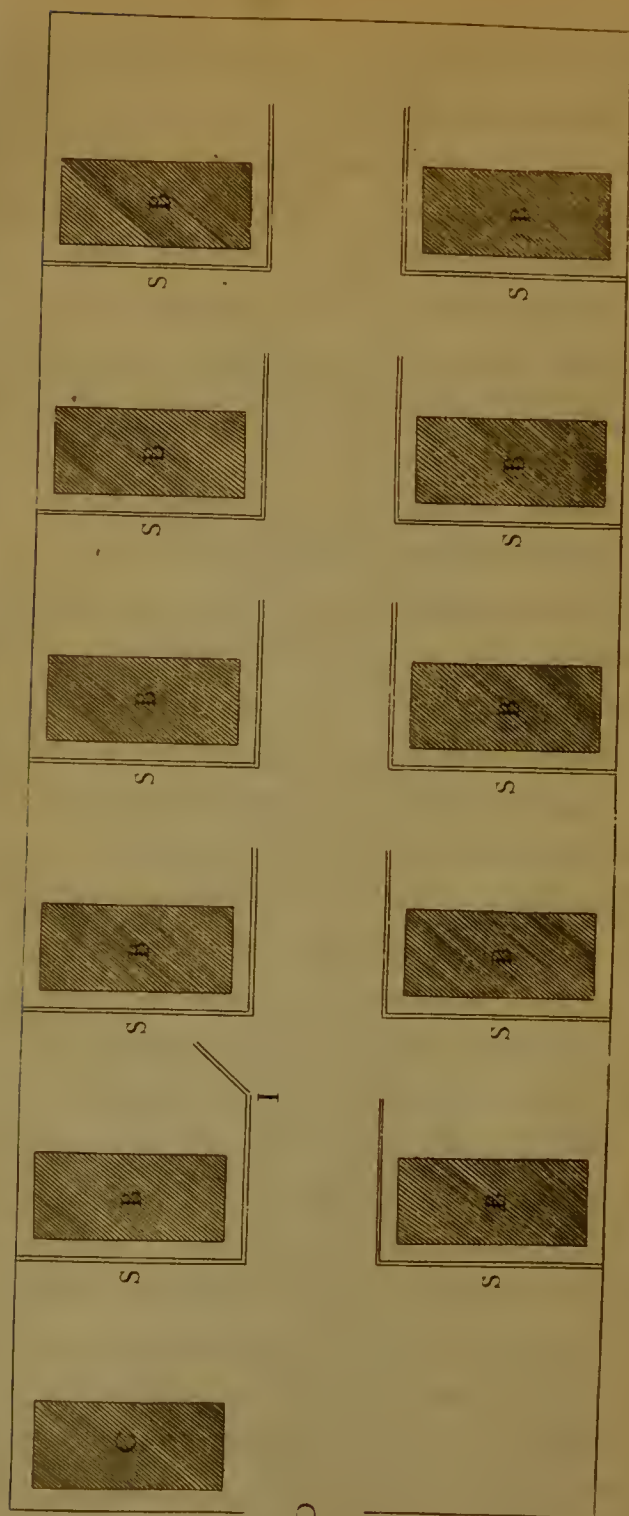
“ I have the honour to be, &c.”

The few instances which I have adduced will suffice to shew the serious evils occasioned by the customary mode of lodging sick officers.

The utility of such an institution as that which I took occasion to recommend in my letter to the inspector of hospitals was, as it appeared to me, universally acknowledged, although it was not provided. Let me hope, however, that should any similar occasion arise hereafter to suggest its formation, the observations which have been stated will not be disregarded.

The only objections which I have heard against the establishment of an hospital for sick officers, were:—1st. That such a species of accommodation would not accord with the feelings and habits of British officers: 2dly. That the establishment would be too expensive.

To say that the accommodation of an hospital fitly appointed for the treatment of officers would be disagreeable to their feelings, is to advance a proposition for which, I confess, I am at a loss to discover any rational support. When the interests of others are concerned, it is but fair to allow those persons an opportunity of answering for themselves. I have conversed with officers of every rank in our service, and have found but one sentiment re-



formly prevailed in that hospital with regard to naval officers.

So far from being dissatisfied, I happen to know, that several of the gentlemen whom I attended in the Haslar hospital expressed an unqualified approbation of the treatment and accommodation of every description which they received.

If it be necessary to advance any other instances to shew that an hospital for the accommodation of our officers is not at variance with their feelings, I might mention the naval hospital in the island of Antigua, where officers are accommodated in a saloon adjacent to the privates themselves.

Some objections have been made to my proposition arising out of the apprehension that officers may be exposed to the view of each other in an hospital; but these objections will be fully obviated by the plan opposite, which I beg leave to recommend.—

The following are the References to the Plate.

D, the entrance of the hospital.

B, the beds.

S, screens forming the compartments, the joints of which are bolted to the floor.

I, a moveable part of the screen, which may be used as a door.

C, nurses' bed.

From the foregoing figure, it will be seen that each officer would possess the accommodation of a separate apartment, in which he could not be seen by any but his attendants, while he would enjoy a sufficiently free circulation of air.

The screens, which form the compartments, might be constructed of such slight materials that they could always be readily made upon foreign service, without materially adding to the incumbrance of stores. The fire-screens which are used in large coffee-rooms, constructed of deal frames and pasteboard, would answer every purpose to which these are meant to be applied.

With respect to the second objection, arising from the expence of the establishment, this will not, I presume, be found entitled to any serious consideration. The principal difference to be made between the accommodation of sick officers and sick soldiers, regards the *quality* of provisions and necessaries; but if the expence arising out of this difference should form any ground of objection, let the officers contribute towards the expence, in proportion to their respective rank and pay. This proposal is agreeable to the practice of the French service, and its equity is indisputable.

But, notwithstanding all that has been urged upon this subject, I wish it still to be understood, that it should be perfectly optional on the part of our officers to avail themselves of the proposed institution. The improbability, however, of any material objection to it on their part, may be obvious,

from the consideration that few rational beings can be disposed to prefer the gratification of false pride and overstrained delicacy, to the restoration of health and the security of life.

I have myself known many officers of proud and honourable minds to express a resolution of preferring even the ordinary military hospital to the inconveniences incident to a private lodging. It is therefore to be hoped, that the high personages to whose department the examination of this subject belongs, and who possess the power of carrying it into effect, will take it into their serious consideration.

Anxious to obtain every information in my power with regard to the subject of which I have been treating, I took the liberty of addressing the following letter to the chirurgien-major of the French army, viz.—

“ Middelburg, September, 25, 1809.

“ Sir,

“ FROM the knowledge I have of your disposition to oblige, I take the liberty of requesting the favour of an answer to the following questions relative to the arrangements of the French military hospitals.

“ 1. Is there an hospital appropriated to the accommodation of sick officers?

“ 2. In what manner is such hospital furnished, and what are the accommodations afforded to each officer individually?

“ 3. At what distance are their beds placed from each other, and what is their peculiar construction?

“ 4. Is there any difference in point of accommodation between officers of high rank and subalterns; and are they all, when sick, obliged without distinction to enter the military hospital, or is it optional with them to be treated in their lodgings at their own expence?

“ 5. Is their wine of a better quality than that which is allowed to the common soldiers? and of what description is their diet?”

“ I hope, sir, you will have the goodness to excuse the liberty which I take in giving you so much trouble. But the subject interests me; as I have reasons which dispose me to think that an establishment similar to that which exists in your army for the treatment of sick officers, would merit the attention of our government.

“ I have the honour to be, &c. A. B. F.”

To this I received the following answer.—

“ *Middelbourg, le 26e Septembre, 1809.*

“ *Boudriot, chirurgien-major de l'hôpital militaire François, à Monsieur A. B. Faulkner, docteur en médecine au service des troupes de sa Majesté Britannique.*

“ Monsieur,

“ L'ETAT que nous professons, nous faisant un devoir de nous intéresser à tout ce qui peut tendre au soulagement de l'humanité, d'après la demande que vous me faites l'honneur de me faire, je répondrai avec autant de précision qu'il me sera possible à vos différentes questions, trop heureux, monsieur, si je puis vous satisfaire, mériter votre estime, et aider à vos bonnes intentions.

1. “ Il y a dans chaque ville de garnison en France, et dans un lieu reconnu comme le plus salubre, une maison connue sous le nom d'hôpital militaire, d'une belle et bonne architecture, dont les salles sont élevées, bien blanchies, et percées de croisées parallèles, faciles à s'ouvrir et à se fermer à la volonté des officiers de santé.

“ 2. Dans le même hôpital il y a toujours un ou deux pavillons, destinés exclusivement à recevoir les officiers de tous grades, quoique libres cependant de se faire traiter dans la maison qu'ils habitent, et toujours à leurs frais.

“ 3. La salle des officiers doit être garnie de lits construits le plus industriusement possible, et éloignés les uns des autres de trois pieds de France, selon le règle-

ment ; séparés par des rideaux par decence, et pour p plus facilement, au besoin, établir un courant d'air.

“ 4. Chaque officier doit avoir, à coté de son lit, une petite table, construite avec adresse, pour y recevoir pots à tisanes, deux petites fioles, un pot-de-nuit, &c.

“ 5. La distribution des médicaments se fait de même que la visite des officiers de santé, médecins ou chirurgiens, deux fois par jour.

“ 6. Les distributions alimentaires sont faites à des heures fixées ; et deux fois par jour on fait le bouillon avec de la viande de beuf seulement, à moins que le médecin ne prescrive qu'on y mette de la volaille. On y ajoute des legumes, connus sous le nom de céleri, carottes, navets, et poireaux : il faut au moins quatre heures pour cette preparation. La ration est d'une livre de viande par jour pour chaque officier ; de même pour le soldat.

“ 7. Indépendamment du bouillon, ou de la soupe, on prescrit encore, selon la volonté des médecins ou chirurgiens-major, du ris, des pruneaux, bouillie, legumes de toutes espèces, roti de veau, mouton, poulets, pigeons, &c. &c.

“ 8. Les officiers, de quelque grade qu'ils soient, sont placés indistinctement dans les mêmes salles, à coté les uns des autres : cependant, rien ne s'oppose à ce qu'ils soient dans des salles destinées à leur grade, s'il y a possibilité.

“ 9. Leur vin est meilleur que celui du soldat ; leurs aliments en général de qualité superieure, préparées avec plus de soin, en proportion de la somme qu'ils laissent à l'administration.

“ J'ai l'honneur d'être,

avec une parfaite considération, &c.

monsieur,

votre très-humble et très-obéissant serviteur,

J. BOUDRIOT,
Chirurgien-major.

“ P.S. En tems de guerre, si le local qu'on aura choisi pour établir l'hôpital général n'est pas assez grand pour y pouvoir recevoir les officiers, on en choisira un autre à proximité, ayant les qualités requises ci-dessus.”

Should the observations which I have felt it my duty to submit in this tract, have any tendency to produce the establishment they are meant to recommend, I shall feel highly gratified, and more than compensated for any trouble I have had in collecting the facts, which, in my humble judgment, demonstrate its expediency.

THE END.